

MayDay 2014

What happened

Mobilization

The stickers and posters came out at the end of March. There was a huge amount of postering, the zines were almost all distributed, and at the end we had the luxury of circulating flyers as a reminder, especially around Cégep du Vieux-Montréal and Cégep St-Laurent. No doubt, this year's mobilization was the most intense since at least 2011.



However, it's clear that protests are risky for people. The number of arrests at previous protests discouraged people from participating, seen in the weak presence at the starting point.

We had very strong support, especially l'ASSÉ, who put our protest and the union march in their action plan. We did not, however, make any official support campaigns.

On April 27th we met up with the IWW to make banners and signs.

We were in contact with independent contingents, in particular a group of fifty people that were located to the west of our starting point, and the Chaotic Insurrection Ensemble, who wanted to march along Saint-Catherine avenue distributing pamphlets about MayDay.

At Parc-des-Faubourgs

The flyers indicated the general strategy and started to be distributed around 5:25pm. People were in charge of distributing these flyers at other strategic points to target everyone heading to the protest.

At 5:55pm and 5:57pm, a few minutes before the start, the police were already in position on our path to form a tight grip. Some organizers attempted to contact the people in charge of the start of the protest to say people should disperse. But there was a problem in communication, so the protest was started anyway. They were surrounded by 6:10pm. Many people who had taken tasks to help the CLAC (calling out slogans, holding banners, protecting the end of the protest, etc.) were in this kettle. Forty people were arrested.

Departure from Papineau metro...

...happened according to plan, that is to say at 6:15pm. It was a departure point that wasn't announced in the flyer, and the goal was to have a back-up protest in case the primary protest was kettled. Assuming that a significant amount of protesters would come by metro, we had positioned people at the exits to tell them to stay in the metro in order to make a secret protest. A flyer with the protest strategy was distributed to them. This protest was kettled in turn, on Saint-Catherine street,



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Bilan factuel et tactique

once again with many people who had tasks for the protest. We refer to this as the “second kettling,” where twenty people were arrested.

Corner of Beaudry and Maisonneuve

This rally, which was supposed to be held at 6:25pm., did not start. We hoped that at least one of the two protest groups could get there. We know that ten arrests occurred on this street corner.

Departure from Berri Square

We know that at least two massive groups, around 50 to 100 people, succeeded in turn to set off from Berri Square/Place Émilie-Gamelin. One group was scattered in the Jeanne-Mance housing area, and the other continued on de Maisonneuve until Bleury, headed south until Saint-Catherine, continued east, and was scattered in Place-des-Arts in front of a strong police presence. There were not any arrests from these two contingents.

At Place Ville-Marie

A lot of protesters went up to Place Ville-Marie, which was the publicly announced political target. There weren't really any cops there.

Within the union protest

An anticapitalist contingent was formed in the union protest by an unyielding group from the previous protests and arrests. We were probably more than a hundred. People in the group decided to continue the protest after the end of the union protest. No route was planned. This independent contingent went behind the Montreal convention center, where the police waited for us at the end of this very long road without the possibility of escape. Thirty people were arrested and several were injured.

Tactics

General findings

- We tried to go in the Quartier Centre-Sud to join the ideas the of going in popular neighborhoods and downtown, hoping they would let us leave the starting point, but this did not work.
- No matter where we make the meeting point, the protest is declared illegal. In all cases, they tried to make mass arrests at the starting point.
- This was a new way of organizing protests, and it demonstrates the importance of continuing to adapt. The flyer with the different meetings points was a very good, new strategy but it was not completely functional. This is as to be expected since it was the first time for us and for the protesters.
- The strategy allowed us, in spite of mass arrests, to succeed at taking the streets. It was for a limited time, but it was an improvement if we compare it to the preceding March 15th protests.

- We were not successful at getting people to scatter quickly, except when that occurred organically.

Strengths

- We successfully marched in spite of P-6. Several small groups of protesters were successful at taking some street corners. This was very good for morale, even if it was temporary.
- Our strategy of dividing cops into several places. The police were disorganized: it was a headache to stop the multiple protests. But, in the end, police brutality increased, as well.
- There were much fewer arrests than past years.
- The media spoke about us and not of the union protest. In spite of their typical shitty coverage, we achieved our media objective: “We are going from here to there for this political reason”
- In the detention centers, the holding times were shorter, probably to free up the police to detain more people

Weaknesses and difficulties

- 10 000 stickers, 3000 zines, 1000-2000 posters, 8000 flyers, 2000 film screenings: enormous efforts to mobilize and distribute materials and awareness, but few results. There were not very many people at the starting point, though this is difficult to know for sure since the police intervened before the start time.
- Less visibility, unequal balance of power and less collective courage because we were scattered into small groups. The multiple protests made it more difficult to rally as a critical mass.
- The distribution of flyers was not effective enough: we did not have sufficient time to explain the strategy because we always had to run to the next meeting point. A lot of people did not really have time to read them. There were a lot of latecomers who did not receive the flyer or could not read it. This could have impacted the outcome of the protest.
- The meeting points were scheduled too close together. People had to run too quickly from one point to the next.
- This strategy asked for active involvement from protesters. It required that they were alert, quick, organized, etc. It asked that the protesters be ready to disperse at any moment. Therefore that made for a less accessible protest.
- The main problem was that it was missing protesters. It is necessary to play down the tickets (P-6, 500.1, etc.). The 250 arrests from the March 15th protest against police brutality really burnt activists.
- Logistically, it's difficult to have protests in working-class neighborhoods, because they are very separated from downtown, where the main political targets are located.

- The police made a show of deployment, to encourage people not to show up. The police went so far as to declare the protest illegal two days in advance to discourage people from coming.
- Because we separated ourselves from marches like the union protest, it took a crew that knew where it was going. The improvised course taken by the group at the head of the protest had to avoid ambushes from the convention centre corridor.

Recommendations and general reflections for the future

- We managed to have the element of surprise this year. How will the State and its police force readjust next year?
- How to encourage the independent efforts of protesters and the participation of groups during mobilization and at the protest in order to engage in a diversity of tactics?
- How to encourage strong and decentralized participation for everyone able to get involved? What do the protesters need to have with them (ex.: informative flyers, banners to get a protest going, email contact, etc.)?
- How to promote another, more proactive way of taking action during a protest? How to advance the notion that we are responsible for our security and responsible to protect ourselves and each other?
- What means of mobilization should we use? How can we broaden people's perspectives on repression and strengthen protesters' confidence? For example, should we use posters, flyers, activities with like-minded groups (like the IWW/CLAC workshop from April 27th), neighbourhood meetings, ... ?
- Is it important to speak publicly in advance to clarify our political objective? Our message came out clearly in the media this year: "We start in a poor neighbourhood and we go to the place that has the money the government refuses to collect"
- How to succeed in getting in contact with a critical mass of protesters?
- What type of protest do we want? With one or more meeting points? With one or more contingents? Is the route planned in advance or left open? Do we have a march or a protest action?

